MISTER PENNY

by

Marie Hall Ets

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MISTER PENNY

STORY AND PICTURES BY MARIE HALL ETS

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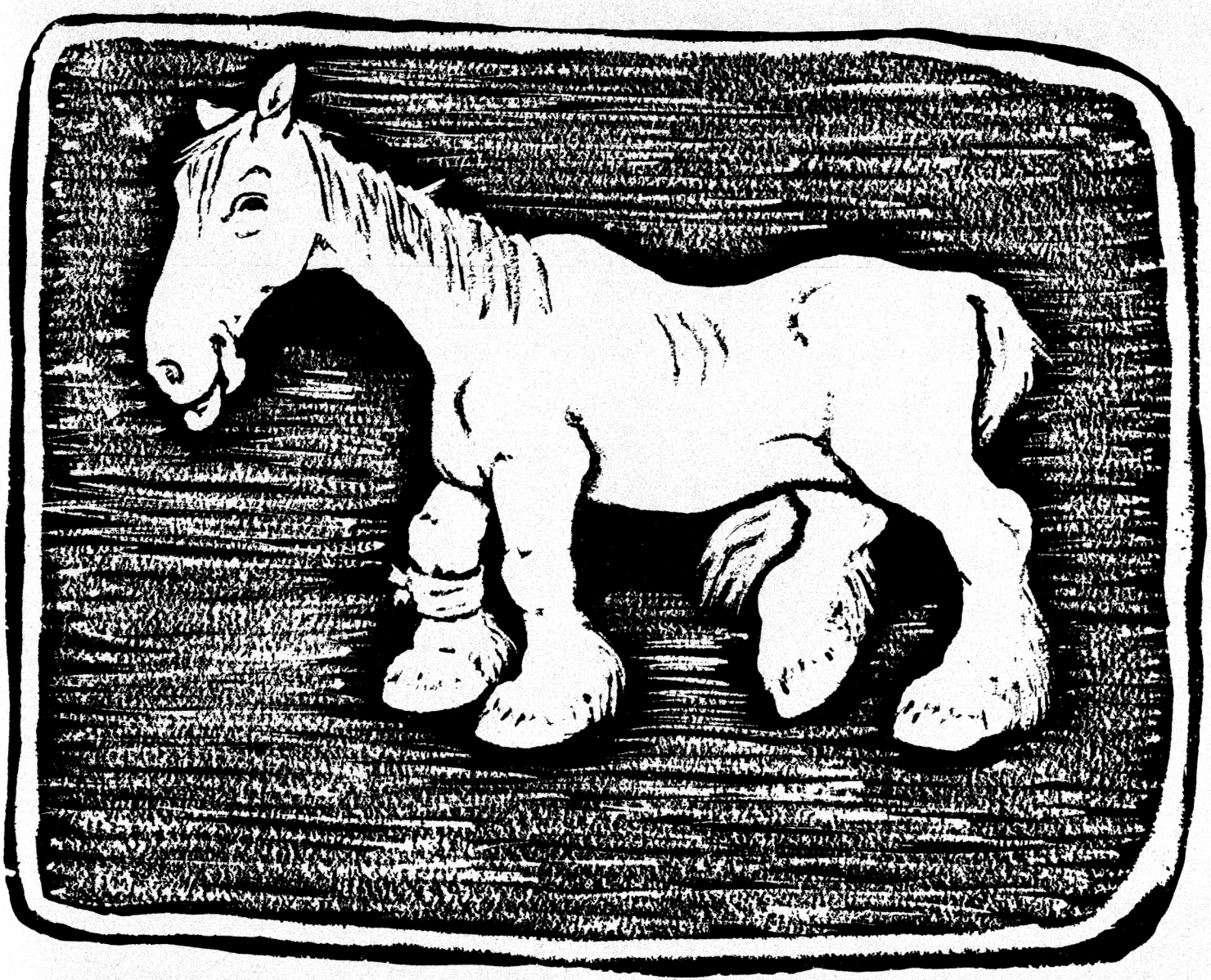
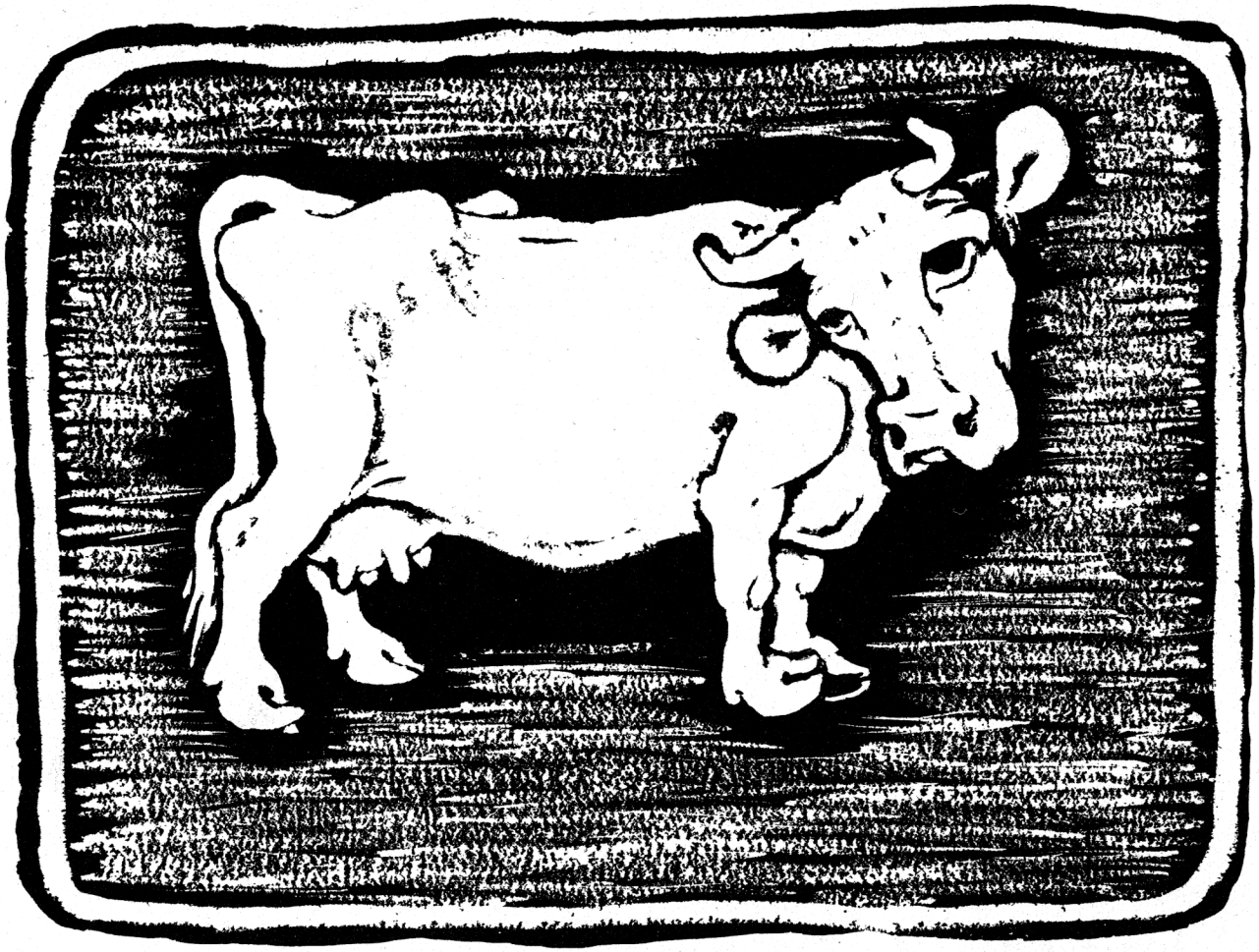
Once there was an old man. His name was Mister Penny. He lived in a tumbledown shed on a stony field by a path to the village of Wuddle. He was too poor to have anything else to live in.

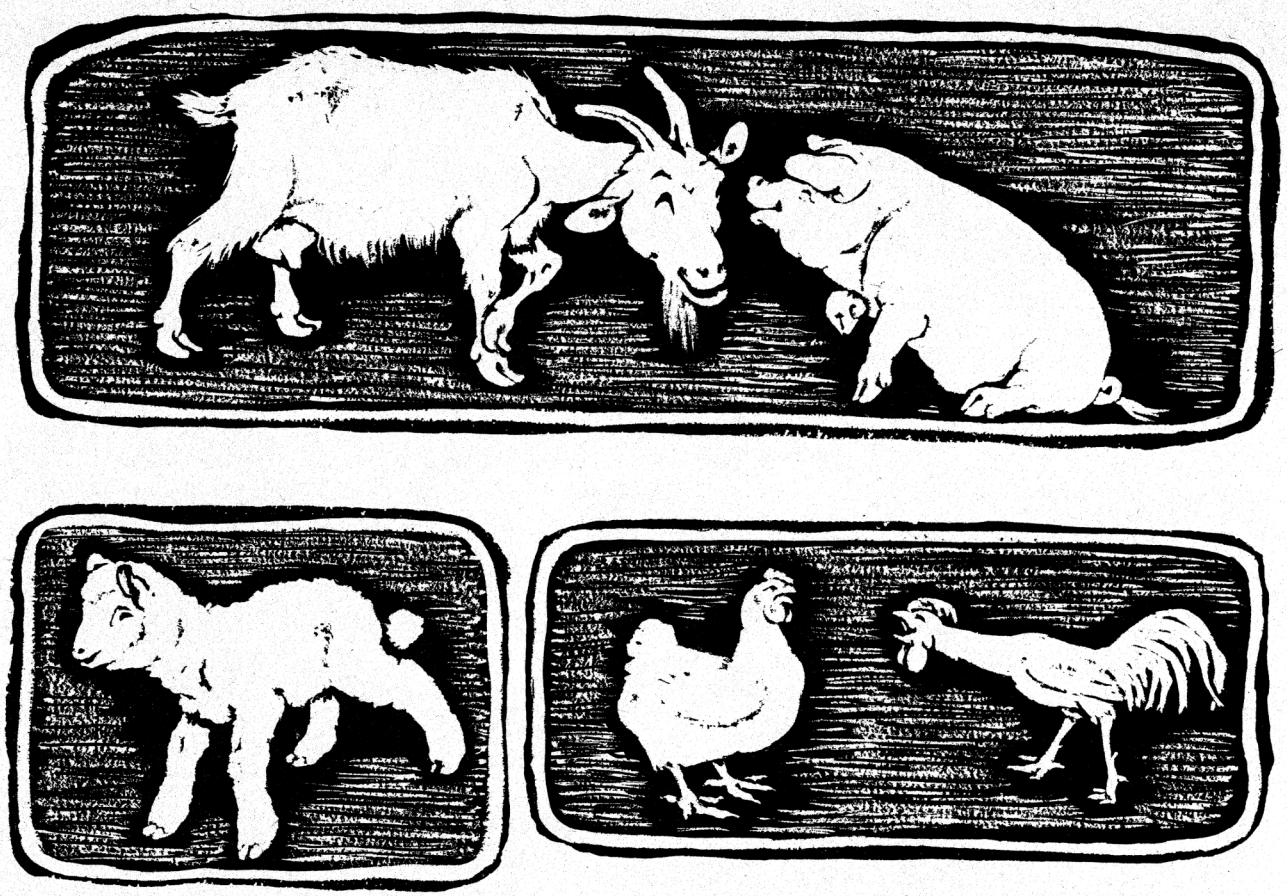
For although he worked year after year in the factory of Wuddle he spent all of his wages buying food for his family. "Sure, a large family does keep a man poor," he would say to himself. "But however could I get along without them? There are no two alike, and not one I could spare, not one to spare."

First he had an old horse named Limpy, who used to limp on his right foreleg because he liked to have it rubbed with liniment and tied up in a bandage like a race horse.





And there was Mooloo the cow, who had beautiful eyes, but who never chewed her cud as other cows do because she was too lazy.



And Splop the goat. And a pig, Pugwug, who grunted when he ate and snored when he slept. And Mimkin, the lamb. And Chukluk, a fat hen. And last of all Doody, a rooster who arched his tail and strutted when he walked.

Every morning before the sun, Mister Penny was up cleaning the shed and preparing food for his animals. When everything was ready, he'd say good-by and tell each one to be good—each one but Doody. When he came to Doody he'd say, "Please try to be good, Doody. You can try to be good, can't you?" Then he'd wait in the yard for the first shriek of the factory whistle, for he had no watch or clock to tell him the time.

And as he trudged off across the fields he would say to himself: "Sure, it's hard for an old man like me to work in a factory. But I'm glad I have a job, that I am. How else would I keep my large family?"

Now one morning after Mister Penny had gone to his work, Doody started running around crowing. When nobody paid any attention to that, he flew to the shed roof and strutted along the edge. "Cock-a-doodle-do," he crowed. "I can see farther than any of you!"

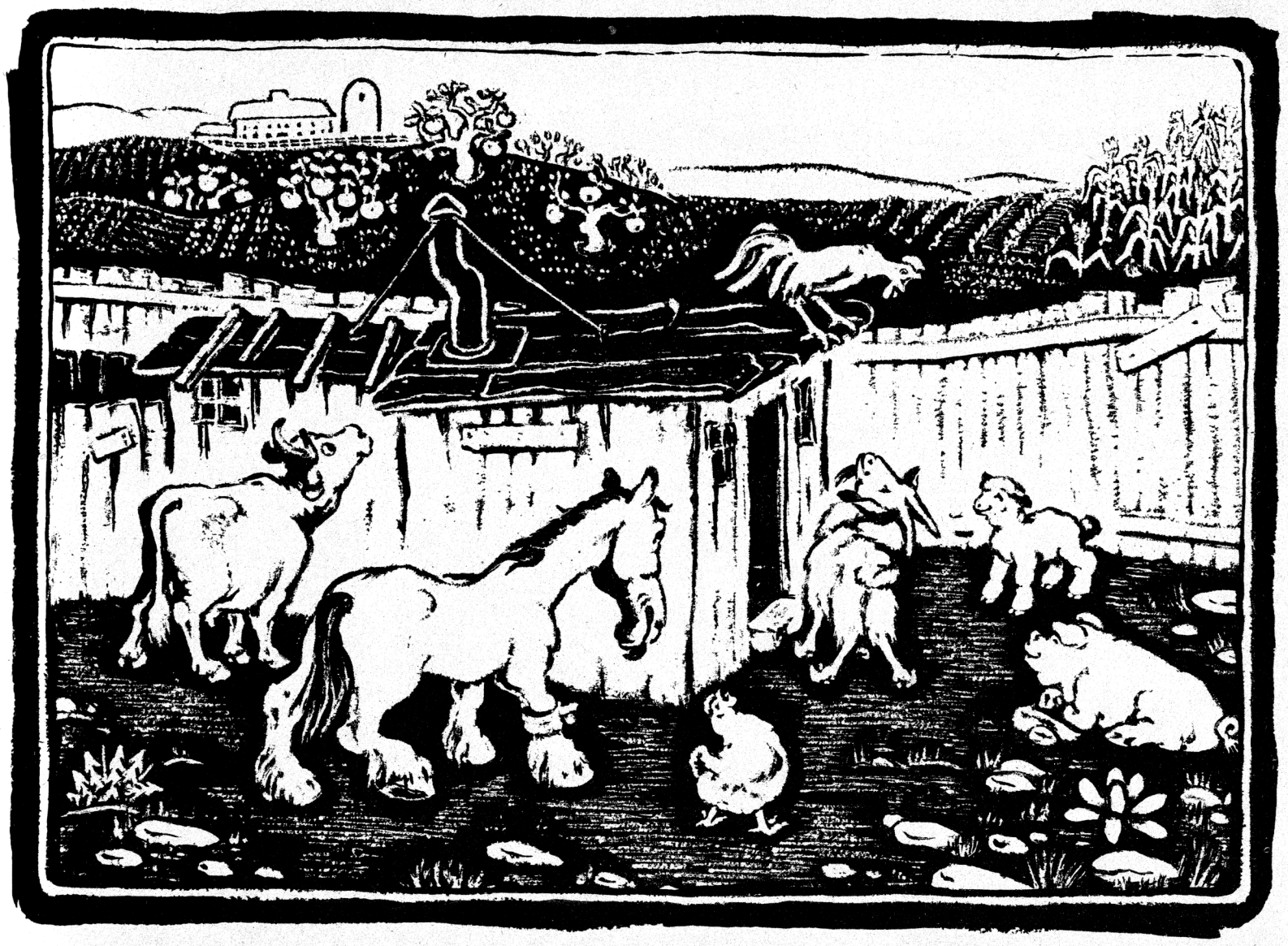
"Well, if you can see so much," said Splop the goat, who was always full of curiosity, "tell us what's growing in the neighbor's garden."

Then all the others pricked up their ears, for Doody began naming everything he saw that was good to eat. And he named some things he didn't see, too.

"Mmmmmm," said Mooloo. "That's the kind of food I like."

"Too bad it belongs to somebody else," said Limpy.

"Aw, why worry?" said Splop. "It belongs to that old Thunderstorm from the city. He'd never see us—his house is way over the hill. And he keeps his watchdog chained up."



When Doody heard that he flapped his wings. And the next minute he was flying right over the fence. "Come back," scolded Chukluk, running after him. "You'd better come back! Come back!" But when she reached the fence she, too, flapped her wings and flew over.

"Those chickens think they're smart because they have wings," said Splop. And off she raced toward the gate.

Now the gate was old and broken and never closed quite tight. Splop pushed her nose through the crack and twisted and squirmed and butted and bumped. At last it opened and out she went. Then out went Limpy and Mooloo and Mimkin. But not Pugwug. The pig had been in such a hurry that he'd tried to squeeze under a hole in the fence.

"Wait for me," he cried. "Wait for me!"

WORMS
FOR
SALE

But nobody heard Pugwug. They were already in the neighbor's garden looking for the things they liked to eat. First they found red strawberries and ate them all up, even the leaves and the blossoms. Then they ate what they wanted of the young cabbages and lettuce. Pretty soon they discovered some little green pumpkins that were growing in the cornfield. They pulled them off the vines and rolled them around like balls. But the little pumpkins were too hard to bite so they left them on the ground.

"Mmm," said Mooloo, when she had eaten so many young cornstalks she didn't seem to care for them any more. She went over by Limpy and the apple trees. "What's the matter?" she asked. For Limpy had stopped chewing apples and stood with his ears straight up, like a horse frightened by some sound.

"What's the matter?" she asked again.

Limpy didn't answer. He lifted his head still higher and looked back over the hill. And there—it *was* a dog he had heard! And behind the dog came the neighbor himself with a whip!

"Run!" Limpy shouted. "Run!"

PLEASE
KEEP OFF

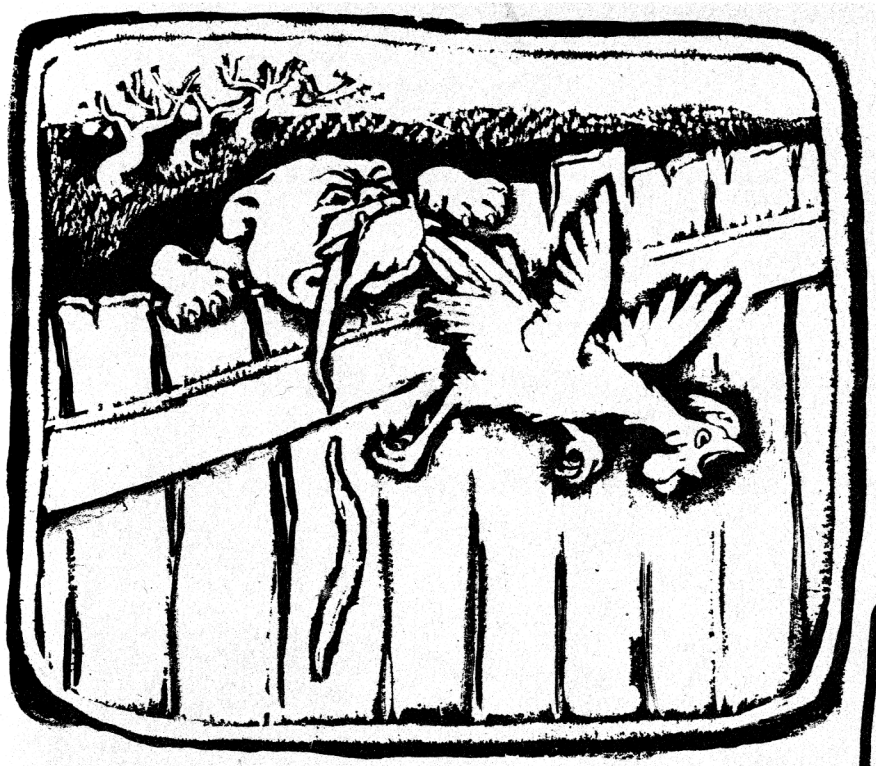
Chukluk started running in circles. "Oh, he'll catch us! He'll catch us! Catch us! Catch us!" she squawked. But soon she found the fence and flew home safely.

The others all ran for the gate—all but Doody. Doody stayed where he was until the dog could see him. Then he arched his tail and strutted.

"Just wait till I catch you, you conceited young bantam," growled the dog. And on he came after the rooster.

Doody laughed and crowed as he dodged along the bushes by the fence. And even when it was time to fly over he stopped and crowed back, "Catch me, old Jawbones! Why don't you catch me?"

That made the dog so angry that he jumped straight into the air. And he *did* catch him—he caught him by the tail. For a moment Doody stopped breathing—he thought he had come to his end. But then he started flapping his wings and pulling. He pulled till his tail came loose. And the next thing he knew he was over the fence and on the ground. After a little he lifted his head to look himself over. And there he had no tail left at all! He jumped up and ran for the shed to hide in the straw.



But the others had no time to notice Doody. The neighbor was there at the gate trying to get in with his whip! He was pushing and pounding. All at once an old board broke in two and in came his head through the hole.

"If he comes any farther I'll butt him!" said Splop. And over she went toward the crack.

When the neighbor saw Splop coming toward him with her head down, ready to butt, he decided he did not want to get in after all, and he took his head out again.

"I'll come back when the old man's home," he said. And off he went up the hill.

Then Mimkin began to cry.

"Don't cry now, Mimkin," said Limpy. "He's gone."

"But my stomach!" said Mimkin. "It aches!"

"Mmmmm," moaned Mooloo. "Mine too-oo!"

Then Limpy began to feel such pains from green apples that he couldn't talk. He went off to his bed in the straw, and the others all followed.

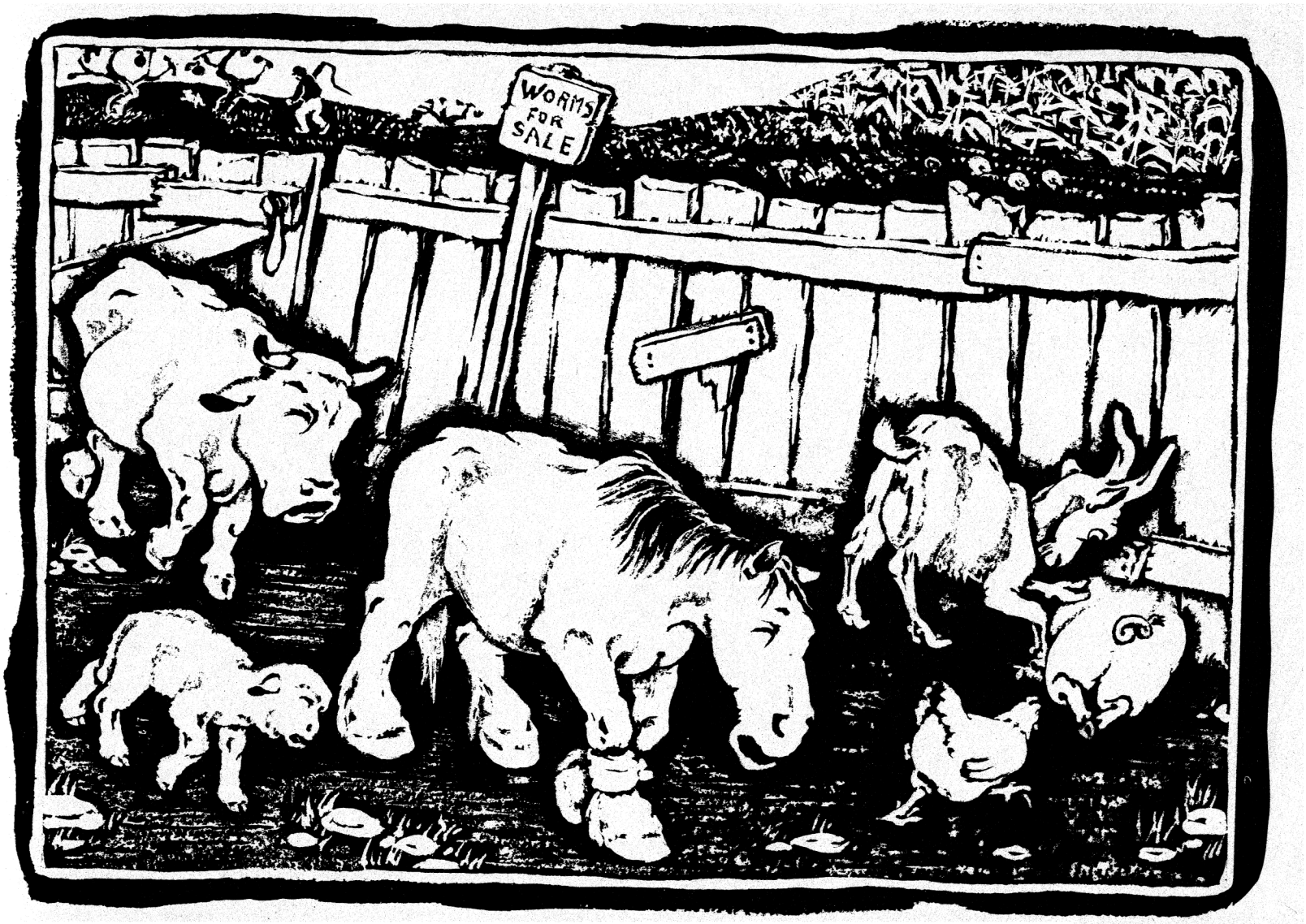
WORMS
FOR
SALE

On their way to the shed Splop spied the tail end of Pugwug under the fence. That poor pig—he was still stuck fast! Splop laughed in spite of her pains. Then she and Chukluk ran to help him. They pawed and scratched away dirt underneath until he had room to wiggle out. But Pugwug was so tired from squealing and grunting that he just followed the others to the shed and was soon fast asleep on the floor.

"What's this, what's this?" said Mister Penny when he opened his gate that evening. "Not one of my family to meet me?"

When he came into the shed and saw them drooping about on the straw, he did not know what to think. He dropped his dinner-pail and ran to look at Limpy's tongue. Then he ran to Mooloo. Her tongue hung down like a piece of wet rag.

"They're sick!" he said. "They're all sick!"


WORMS
FOR
SALE

He ran for a tablespoon. Then he took the big jug from the corner shelf and started measuring out sticky medicine. But he had to open each animal's mouth and pour it in because they didn't like it. And Pugwug got some too, though he kicked and cried—*he* wasn't sick and he didn't want medicine! He wanted something to eat!

Last of all Mister Penny came to Doody. He picked him up from the straw to pour his medicine in. "What's this?" he exclaimed. "What's happened to you?" Then he searched on the floor. But he could see no sign of a tail there, either.

"But what could have happened? All sick at once!—and no tail on the rooster!" He put Doody down and covered him up again with the straw, because he thought he might feel cold. Then he tried to think of something else he could do.

"I could rub them all good with liniment," he said to himself. And off he went for the bottle. But when he came back they were all acting drowsy from the medicine, and even Limpy didn't want to be bothered.

"They'll feel better if they can sleep," he said. So he brought fresh straw and tucked it in all around.

Then he took the lantern and tiptoed off to his end of the shed. He closed the door and took off his shoes so he wouldn't disturb them. After a little he brought out some bread and cheese for his supper. But he didn't seem to feel hungry. So he put it away again and took up the evening paper.

He was just reading the funny pictures when there came a loud knock on his door.

"My eyes!" he exclaimed as he jumped up to open. "Who can it be?"

Now Limpy had heard too. He got up and stuck his head through a hole in the partition.

In came the big neighbor, waving his cane and shouting like a madman.

"Whatever is the matter with him?" thought Mister Penny. "And is it with *me* he is angry?" For the man's words were exploding like the cork from a popgun, and Mister Penny couldn't understand him at all. He was saying something about *young cornfield! . . . worse than a hailstorm! . . . no tops on the carrots! . . . new tomato plants strewn all over the ground! . . . seeds scratched up! . . . every apple with a bite in it!*

"It's his garden," thought Mister Penny. "Something's happened to his garden."

Then he felt shivers running up and down his back for he caught the words, *worthless beasts . . . good-for-nothing creatures . . . greedy pests!*

"So that's what happened—that's what made them all sick." Mister Penny shook his head. "Ah me, ah me, this is our ruin for sure."

"But it's my fault," he said to the neighbor. "I knew the gate needed mending. Yet what can I do with no money to pay for the damage? Whatever can I do to pay?"

"You'd just better get rid of those pests," said the neighbor. "I'll take them myself in pay for their damage—though they're not worth the straw they sleep on. I suppose the hog would do for bacon, and the lamb for stew."

"Oh please, sir! Please!" said Mister Penny. "Not that! Not that!"

"Well," said the neighbor, "I'm behind with my work. If you must keep those pests, here's what you can do: plow the three south fields before the new moon; clean out the stones and weeds from that pasture land behind my barn; cut the grass on my lawn; and then you can furnish me milk for the rest

of the summer—you have a cow and I haven't." The man slapped a paper on the table. "It's all written down," he said. "Decide over night which you'll do—give me your beasts, or do this work."

When the neighbor had gone Mister Penny sat down by his table. "Ah me, ah me!" he said to himself. "Is there nothing I can do to save my family? To do all this work I'd have to stay home from the factory—I'd lose my job. And I can't buy them feed without wages—they'd starve. But better I lose my job than let *him* take them—to butcher! If I knew an old woman who'd be kind and feed them I'd give them to her. But I don't know any old woman! Ah me, ah me! What can I do?"

Now Limpy, who had been watching and listening, was trying to think, too. After a little he went over to Mooloo and woke her up. When the cow heard what had happened she almost cried.

"We've got to do something!" said Limpy.

"But what can we do?" asked Mooloo.

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Limpy, "I'm not so lame as I might be. I can do that plowing as well as any other horse. And there's a collar on that old plow in the corner. I'm going to do the plowing!"

"You know," said Mooloo, "I've only been giving a cupful of milk in the bottom of the pail. I was too lazy to chew my cud, that's why. But I'll chew my cud thirty hours a day before I'll let that terrible man take any of us! It makes my milk curdle to think of him!"

"What's the matter?" crowed Doody from the straw.

"Hush!" said Limpy. "People will think it's time to get up before they've gone to bed."

Then Splop came tumbling over to see what had happened. She was so noisy about it that she woke up Mimkin and Chukluk. But not Pugwug—the pig could sleep through anything.

"Say!" said Splop. "If that old Thunderstorm ever tries to take *me* away from Mister Penny I'll butt him so high into the air that he'll never come down."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Limpy. "We spoiled his garden and we've got to pay. What work do you choose?"

"I don't choose any!" said Splop. "But if it *has* to be done I'll clean out those old stones. Come on! When de we start?"

"I'll clip the grass," said Mimkin.

"The best thing I can do," said Chukluk, "is to eat that nasty hens-tonic-and-grit so that I can lay bigger eggs and more of them."

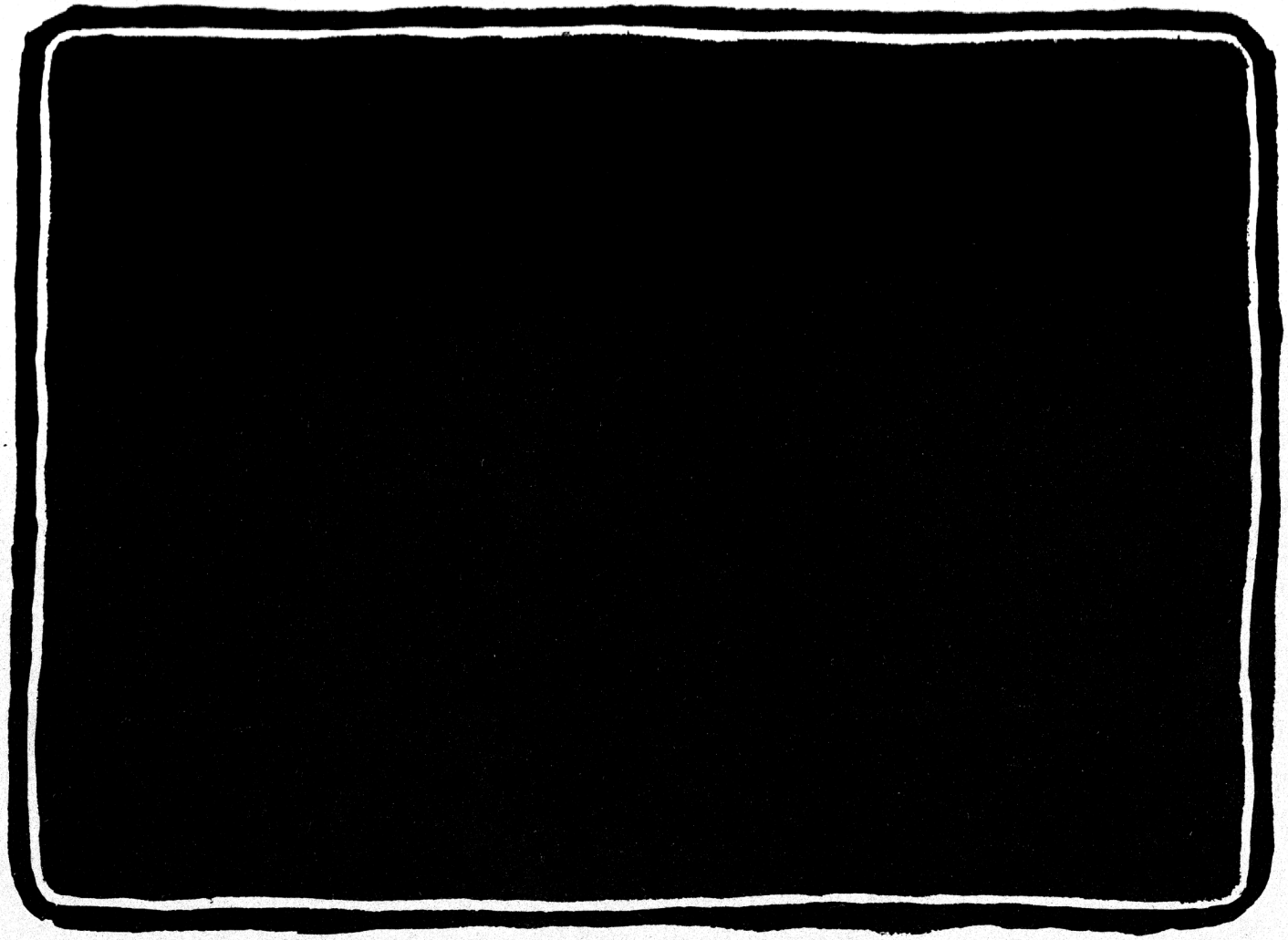
Splop whisked her beard in Doody's eyes. "What good is a rooster without any tail?" she teased. "All he can do is eat bugs."

That gave Limpy an idea—Doody could follow the plow and save all the worms. Mister Penny never had enough worms in his can for all those men who came from the city to fish.

"Well, come on!" said Splop. "Let's go!"

Limpy looked through the crack: Mister Penny had fallen asleep with his head on the table. He looked out the window: everything was black. So then he let Splop run ahead to open the gate and he went back in the corner to get the plow. He pushed his head through the collar. "Oh, I almost forgot!" he said. He went over to Pugwug and woke him up. "I need something heavy to hold the plow down. Come!" And out they went into the dark—all but Mooloo and Chukluk, who stayed behind to chew a cud and eat grit.

All through the night Mister Penny sat by his table and tried to think. Whenever he fell asleep

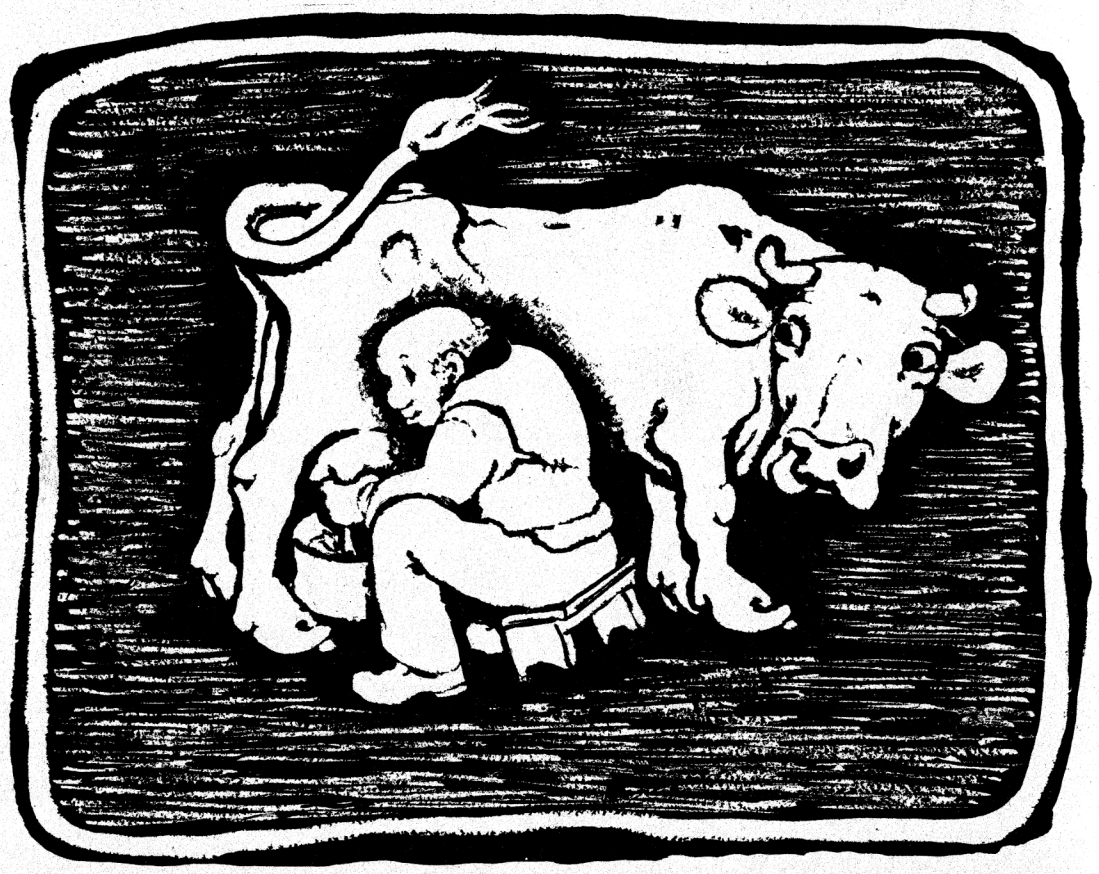


Here they are working in the neighbor's garden.

bad dreams woke him up. When morning came he still didn't know how to save his animals. He went back to look at them. "All sleeping except Mooloo and the chickens," he said to himself. "But they don't act sick exactly. They must be feeling better." He put his stool down beside Mooloo and started to milk. "They feel better, I'm sure. They're just sleeping."

After a little he turned back to his milking.

"Mooloo!" he cried. "*Mooloo!*" For there, instead of a cupful in the bottom, his pail was *full*—and there was cream in it, too! He jumped up and threw his arms around Mooloo's neck. "Good Mooloo! If you only could know how much I need this milk! I'll take my neighbor more than he said! And there's plenty for me—and to sell, besides!"



And Mister Penny started off in such a hurry that he almost didn't notice the chickens who were squawking and crowing trying to make him look.

He put down his pail and went to see if by any chance Chukluk had laid an egg. He bent over to look closer at something he saw in the straw. Then he covered his face with his hands and just peeked. But still he saw the same thing —an egg as large as a goose could lay! And a canful of beautiful worms! He grabbed up one chicken under each arm and danced around. But he squeezed them so hard that they squawked to get down.

He cooked the egg for his dinner-pail. Then he ran out and put the worms on his stand outside the fence—he sold them like newspapers with a box for the money—two for a penny or five cents a dozen. Next he strained part of the milk into his newest tin pail and was off up the hill to his neighbor's. When he knocked on the neighbor's back door the neighbor came out and said:

"Well, old man, I see you have a lot of it done already! If you work as fast every night as you did last night you'll have it *all* done before the new moon."

Mister Penny looked around to see what the man was talking about. The grass near the house was cut short; a big pile of stones and weeds had been cleaned out from the pasture land; and in the fields was a long stretch of newly plowed earth.

"He must imagine *I* did it!" thought Mister Penny. But before he could open his mouth the neighbor had gone in and shut the door. "Do I dare knock again to tell him?" And he stood there trying to decide. Then there came the first shriek of the factory whistle. "No," he said. "I'll go to my job—I can keep my family one day more!"

"I can't understand it at all!" he kept saying to himself as he trudged across the fields. "I can't understand it at all! Somebody's been doing that work. And in the night, too! Sure there's some mistake! None but goblins and witches and fairies and things do their work in the night when no one can see. And the milk! And that egg! And where under the sun did those worms come from? But sure I'm awake or I wouldn't be sniffing of the catnip—and feeling that stone in my shoe."

The next morning everything happened just as it had the day before. More milk with cream in it. Another giant egg. A canful of beautiful worms. And twice as much work done at the neighbor's.

"Well, old man," said the neighbor as he took the milk. "You worked faster last night than before. You'll have the damage paid for before the new moon." And again, before Mister Penny could open his mouth, the neighbor went in and shut the door.

"Well, I'm jigsawed to a puzzle!" said Mister Penny as he started off to his job in the factory of Wuddle. "Jigsawed to a puzzle! Somebody's doing that work—and they're doing it in the night! It *must* be the goblins and witches and fairies and things who are helping me out—though I never properly believed in them before. Goblins and witches and fairies and things!"

THE
HOME
OF
friend-in-need
SAFETY-PINS

On the first night of the new moon Mister Penny's animals came tumbling home all out of breath. They woke up Mooloo. They woke up the hen. "Hurrah! Hurrah! It's done! It's all done! The damage is paid for! It's finished! It's done!"

"And what now?" said Splop kicking her legs in every direction at once. "I like to work! It's fun."

"Me, too," said Mimkin the lamb. "And me!" said Doody. "And me," said Pugwug, "I like to ride on that plow."

Limpy dragged the plow to its place in the corner. He was smiling to himself. "You know," he said, "I've been thinking all the while I've been plowing. What stupid creatures we've been—never doing anything, before, because it was easier not to. And now that we've tried it we'd all rather work than be idle! And all this time we might have had a garden right here—for ourselves and for Mr. Penny!"

"Ooooh!" said Splop. "We'd better get started! This field is more stones than dirt!"

But Limpy made them all hurry to bed because it was almost time for Mister Penny to be getting up. Tomorrow night they could start.

When Mister Penny came out of his shed on Monday morning his pipe dropped from his mouth. For there at one end of his own field the ground had been plowed, and piles of the stones cleaned out! "Those good creatures!" he said. "They did all that work for my neighbor! And now they're starting a garden for me! A garden for me and my animals!" And Mister Penny just stood there staring until the shriek of the factory whistle made him jump and start off to his work.

As he hurried across the fields he laughed to himself and talked back to the birds and crickets. "We'll have sunflowers in it," he said. "And pansies, and squash. A garden for me and my animals—and for the birds and the crickets, too. We'll have sunflowers in it."

On Saturday noon Mister Penny hurried home from the factory. He took all the pennies he'd saved from selling worms and milk—a whole bagful of pennies—and he and his family went to market to buy seeds. First they bought seeds for all the things they liked to eat—except horseradish; they decided not to bother with *that* because you can't make a good meal out of horseradish even when you're hungry. Then they bought sunflower seeds and pansy plants and rose bushes and some bulbs for hyacinths. They hurried home and Mister Penny planted everything in the nice, soft dirt in his field. The rains came and the sun grew warm. And before very long Mister Penny's garden was the most beautiful garden in the township of Wuddle.

But Mister Penny still thought it was goblins and witches and fairies and things who were helping him out when no one could see. Until one night there came a storm. The thunder got him up. He went out to see if his garden was all right. He thought he saw something moving. He set his lantern down behind him and looked again.

"Those blessed creatures!" he said to himself. "But they shouldn't be out in such weather! If they're not afraid I'll take them inside for hot tea so they won't catch cold."

He went very, very slowly toward the biggest thing he saw moving. "Don't be afraid," he said. "It's only Mister Penny." But just as he reached it there came a flash of lightning as bright as day.

"Well, what on earth?" he exclaimed. For, as sure as breathing, the big black thing was Limpy pulling the plow with Pugwug sitting on it to hold it down! And behind walked Doody looking for worms!—and a little farther over was Splop cleaning out weeds and stones!—and Mimkin clipping grass!

Mister Penny dropped his umbrella and started running around in the rain, patting each one. "So you are the goblins and witches and fairies and things!" he chuckled. "My own 'worthless beasts!' Oh, my good family, with such a garden we'll have more than a plenty to eat, and I'll no longer need work in that screeching factory of Wuddle! I can stay right at home and just work in my garden!"

So Mister Penny kept on selling worms and milk, and then he sold truckloads of stones—for filling up holes in the road. And soon he had enough money to buy lumber and paint. Then he built a new house in the middle of his garden—a long pink house with seven doors in a row. On the top he put a vane for the winds to play with, and a little house for the birds. And near some bushes in the yard he laid an old board for the crickets to hide under.

N
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When spring came again the big neighbor came back from the city. He offered Mister Penny plenty of new bills from his leather fold for the cow with good milk and the hen with big eggs. But Mister Penny shook his head and smiled. "I'm sorry, good neighbor," he said, "but you'll have to buy your animals some other where. I've not one I can spare. None to spare."

And as the evenings grew long with the summer, the people of Wuddle started following their children across the fields to look at the pink house and the beautiful garden. The old women would smell the roses on the low latticed fence and say to each other, "Isn't he a queer one, that old Penny—living in a house with all those animals! But I declare they are happy. They're the happiest family in Wuddle."